

**Amendments to the Claims:**

The following listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (Currently Amended) A submerged sample observation apparatus comprising:

a scanning probe microscope including a cantilever having a probe arranged at ~~the-a~~ forward end thereof, a light source for applying light on the cantilever and a detector for detecting the light reflected from the cantilever;

a sample container having a side wall for holding a liquid therein; and means arranged on ~~the-a~~ surface of the liquid for preventing volatilization of the liquid;

wherein the probe is brought in closely opposed relation to a sample in the liquid in the sample container, the relative positions of a probe and a sample are changed and, based on the interaction between the probe and the sample, a surface image of the sample is produced thereby to observe the sample.

2. (Original) A submerged sample observation apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said means for preventing volatilization of said liquid is a layer of a sealing liquid formed on the surface of said liquid, said sealing liquid having a lower specific gravity than said first liquid and not mixed with said first liquid.

3. (Original) A submerged sample observation apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said means for preventing volatilization of said liquid is a layer of an oil formed on the surface of said liquid.

4. (Original) A submerged sample observation apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said means for preventing volatilization of said liquid is a Langmuir-Blodgett film formed on the surface of said liquid.

5. (Original) A submerged sample observation apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said means for preventing volatilization of said liquid is a resin film formed on the surface of said liquid.

6-10. (Cancelled)

11. (Currently Amended) A method of observing a sample submerged in a liquid using a scanning probe microscope comprising a cantilever having a probe arranged at the forward end thereof, a light source for applying light on the cantilever and a detector for detecting the light reflected from the cantilever;

wherein the probe is brought in closely opposed relation to a sample in the liquid in a sample container, the relative positions of the probe and the sample are changed and, based on the interaction between the probe and the sample, a surface image of the sample is produced thereby to observe the sample, and

wherein means for preventing volatilization of the liquid is arranged on the surface of the liquid.

12. (Original) A method of observing a sample submerged in a liquid according to claim 11, wherein said means for preventing volatilization of said liquid is a layer of a sealing liquid formed on the surface of said liquid, said sealing liquid having a lower specific gravity than said first liquid and not mixed with said first liquid.

13. (Original) A method of observing a sample submerged in a liquid according to claim 11, wherein said means for preventing volatilization of said liquid is a layer of an oil formed on the surface of said liquid.

14. (Original) A method of observing a sample submerged in a liquid according to claim 11, wherein said means for preventing volatilization of said liquid is a Langmuir-Blodgett film formed on the surface of said liquid.

15. (Original) A method of observing a sample submerged in a liquid according to claim 11, wherein said means for preventing volatilization of said liquid is a resin film formed on the surface of said liquid.

16-20. (Cancelled)